



Proposed NRDP Grant Modification for the Milltown State Park Development (5-16-13)

Background

In 2010 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) was awarded a grant from the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) to develop the initial infrastructure for the new Milltown State Park (\$927,530), to acquire additional property for the Park (\$1,080,000), and to conduct initial operation and maintenance activities over a 5-year period at the Park (\$656,219). This 2009 grant project was based on a 2008 conceptual design developed with Missoula County and the Milltown Superfund Redevelopment Working Group. Significant changes in the development context prompted FWP, through Montana State Parks, to seek a grant modification in 2012 to shift the development focus and funds from the Gateway area to the Confluence area. In addition, funds awarded for the design of the Clark Fork River pedestrian bridge were reallocated to the Confluence area development. (Bridge design was terminated at the conceptual level (30% design). The Governor approved this 2012 change in scope, subject to a funding condition stipulating that permanent access be secured before development in the Confluence area, as recommended by the NRDP, the Advisory Council, and the Trustee Restoration Council.

This second request for modification relates to the entrance to the Confluence area, the site of trails, river access and interpretive exhibits. Two roads enter the area: 1) the access road that crosses the International Paper (IP) land to the west of the Confluence; and 2) access via Juniper Drive, a state road managed by Missoula County, that enters the park through a low, narrow and aging railroad underpass owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe and leased by Montana Rail Link. The underpass poses challenges for safe traffic flow and emergency access, but it has yet to be investigated from a traffic engineering and public safety perspective. The 2012 modification was based on use of the IP access road.

Since the 2012 modification, plans for entrance into the Confluence area significantly hinged on access through the IP property. IP has offered a donation of the land to the State, but it has steadfastly denied FWP the full opportunity to perform its due diligence in acquiring the 16-acre parcel. A 5-acre landfill, containing boiler ash and wood waste from the Champion mill, forms the northern portion of the land. IP has declined to give FWP the permission to conduct the necessary test sampling in the landfill to determine if contamination issues exist that would make the State potentially liable in the future. This issue remains at an impasse.

Proposed Modification

Public access is vital to the Confluence area, the heart of the park and a prime administrative site. Montana State Parks requests the authorization to investigate and pursue all options for public access at the Confluence site, including, but not limited to:

- Vehicle access through the Juniper Drive railroad underpass;
- Parking at the end of Juniper Drive with walk-in access through the underpass; and
- Future access through IP land.

While investigating access, Montana State Parks also seeks to proceed with non-motorized vehicle access amenities at the Confluence area such as, but not limited to; a visitor contact station, an interpretive shelter, hand launch boat ramp, safety and boundary fencing, toilets, signing, and trails. Until permanent road access is established into the Confluence area, FWP does not propose to construct roads or other park amenities that are associated with vehicle access. The modification would give Montana State Parks greater latitude to pursue park implementation at the already very challenging site.

FWP seeks a favorable recommendation by the Advisory Council and Trustee Restoration Council and a decision by the Governor to approve:

A modification to the 2009 NRDP grant, amended in 2012, for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to investigate and pursue alternative options for public access into the Confluence area and to start limited infrastructure activities associated with non-vehicle access within the Confluence area prior to establishment of permanent access.



An aerial view of the IP property, Juniper Drive and the Confluence area of Milltown State Park.